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ABSTRACT

Intended for parents, this paper shares tips for seizing opportunities to insure success in reading for children, observing that the three areas which have surfaced as most critical to reading success are all dependent upon what parents do with their children at home. The paper lists reading to children, talking and listening to them, and helping broaden their experience base as areas most critical for reading success. Thirty-three tips for parents are provided in all, divided into three groups. First, 18 tips are listed to show the importance of reading aloud on children's progress in reading. Second, five tips are listed to encourage parents to develop the art of conversation with their children. Third, 10 tips are listed to illustrate ways for parents to broaden the experience base of their children. (MG)

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"Tune in and Talk"

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The following paper was presented to parents of Chapter I children attending the Chapter I, Region 6 Conference entitled "Parents As Partners Make A Difference." The conference was held at Indiana University Purdue University of Indianapolis, on the Columbus, Indiana site, May 8, 1990.

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For us as parents, every year is "The Year of the Child" and every president must be "The Education President." Our priorities for our children demand excellence in education from our country, our schools, and twenty-four hours a day from ourselves. While we welcome our schools to fill the role of providing the formal education of our children, we realize our obligation and our commitment to supplement the role of the school and enrich the lives of our children as only a parent can. We need not hold ourselves responsible for providing formal lessons as taught at school, but rather for seizing those moments throughout the day that could result in real learning experiences for our children. Taking the time for conversing, explaining, and dreaming provides children a chance to grow because they need to verbalize and fantasize, as well as memorize, if they are truly to profit from their education. As parents, we need to "turn off" the distractions and "tune in" to the opportunities that surround us.

Although I had taught graduate and undergraduate reading methods courses for seven years, it was with the birth of my first child that I began to study the research on reading achievement in a different light. I wanted to know, not just how teachers should teach reading, but rather what were the common factors that contributed to a child's success in reading. Ironically, the three areas which surfaced as most critical to reading success were all dependent upon what parents did with their children at home. Following is a list of those critical areas with tips for seizing opportunities to insuring success in reading for your child.

Three Areas Most Critical to Reading Success

1. Read to your children.
2. Talk to them and listen to them.
3. Broaden their experience base.

Read to your children

Being read to is essential to children's progress in reading. It improves their vocabulary, heightens their interest, expands their ability to comprehend subsequent stories, and gives them an opportunity to model fluent reading.

1. Read to them and emerse them in reading. Read story books, poems, and plays.
   - Alternate reading by page or paragraph.
   - Take roles, read together, and use some props or costumes to act out plays, stories, or songs.
2. Make bedtime equal story hour. Read with enthusiasm.
3. Make sure they see you read.
   - Read to them from the newspaper or magazines, ie, dinosaur finds, weather, movie/TV info, concert and celebrity info.
4. Buy the children subscriptions to magazines.
5. Give them their own library card on special occasions (birthday, Easter basket, stocking stuffer).
   - See to it that they get to the library regularly and turn to the library for special programs; ie, puppet shows, plays, story hour.
6. Provide them with their own bookcase or storage system. Let them help select and organize their special area.

7. When you go to the mall, browse through the bookstores.
8. Encourage older children to read to younger ones.
9. Write notes to them as you do your spouse. Give them their own stationery.
10. Have them write or type your grocery list.
11. Buy them stickers and help them write their own rebus story.
12. Furnish them with bare books or diaries to encourage writing and reading their own work.
13. If you own a computer, buy educational software and a word processing program.
14. If you have a Nintendo, sell it!
15. Take advantage of holiday giving.
    - For Christmas give word games.
    - Put books in the Easter basket.
    - On birthdays give a gift certificate to a bookstore.
16. Have the children help with cooking. Read the recipe with them. Work on following directions. Let them measure and mix. Explain, discuss, enjoy!
17. Have children help with cleaning chores. Work from a list.
    - Let them type/write the original.
    - Have them check off chores completed.
    - Talk as you clean and explain the reasons for step-by-step procedures and the need for organization.
18. Provide a study area for school aged children. Begin immediately with a designated location that is quiet and well lighted with necessary study materials (pens, paper, tape, dictionary, books, etc.) always in the same location.

Talk to them and listen to them

Develop the art of conversation with your children. Talking to them sets forth a language for them to model and listening to them provides them with a stage for their language development. Language development is crucial to reading achievement.

1. Talk to your children from the time they are born, but talk to them in a clear voice using standard English.
2. Repeat positive comments and praise them.
3. When they begin to talk, if they mispronounce words, repeat them correctly. Do not reprimand the error, just model proper enunciation and usage.
4. Discuss topics on TV. Plot? Characters? Predict outcomes.
5. Most importantly take advantage of all the time you have with your child to communicate. Turn off the radio in the car and tune in to what they want to discuss.
   - Use car time (phenomenal amount) to play word games; ie, rhyming words, words that begin with _____.
   - Chant irregular verb forms.
   - Hold a spelling challenge. "Patrick, what does 'g-r-e-e-n' spell?" "Alison, if 'u-p' is up what is 'd-o-w-n'?"
   - Use word families to unlock new words, "If 'm-a-t' is mat, what is 'p-a-t'?"
   - Locate words in alphabetical order found on street signs and billboards.
   - Rap messages or prepositions.
   - Sing "Old McDonald Had a Vowel A-E-I-O-U."

Broaden their experience base

Make every place you go an opportunity to communicate with your children and teach them something they didn't know before. Children draw on their past experiences when they read. The greater the experience base, the greater the comprehension and the vocabulary.

1. If you drive past a river, teach your child the name of the river, the states it goes through, uses of the river, and terms such as, "current," "bank," "mouth," etc. Discuss types of boats.
2. In your home town your child should recognize important buildings, such as the federal building, police station, post office, library, historical sites, churches, skyscrapers, and war memorials.
3. On Veteran's Day or Memorial Day take your children to celebrations held on historical sites or at war memorials and discuss previous wars. Look at dad or granddads medals or uniforms and have them share their actual stories.
4. A trip to the grocery story should be a real learning experience.
   - Look at the ads together and have the child circle with a marker the products you want.
   - Discuss the "lost leader" and advantages of one store over the other.
   - Discuss the four food groups and their locations in the store.
   - Compare prices between brands.

- Discuss savings which result from buying in bulk while products are on sale.
- Don't miss reading the nutritional info on labels, especially fat content, sodium, and calories.

5. A simple detour to a pet store can provide children with an opportunity to see a variety of animals in a short time. Ask the clerk to discuss differences among mice, gerbils, hamsters, and rats.
6. Walk through the city and discuss careers, pollution, buildings, and traffic.
7. Walk through the country and discuss animals, farms, types of homes/land, jobs, pollution, and similarities and differences between city life and country life.
8. Take your child inside an elaborate hotel. Point out the shops, ride the elevator, and have a coke in one of the many restaurants. Discuss such terms as porter, bellhop, desk clerk, reservationist, lobby, ballroom, suite, etc.
9. The zoo, the library, and theme parks are guaranteed learning experiences if you talk your way through each one. Trips to the swimming pool, ball game, wrestling match, filling station dump, park, and church are equally educational if you discuss the terms associated with each.
10. Family vacations are prime time for learning.
    - Read with your child in advance about the places you plan to visit.
    - Use a map to plan your route and let the children keep track of the map and figure gas mileage as you travel.

- Keep a tour book in the car.
- Encourage them to keep a journal nightly, recording all that they have seen each day.
- Point out areas of interest children might not notice.
- Use descriptive vocabulary when describing the scenery.
- Buy postcards and have children write to friends at home.
- Take pictures and have the children fill the photo album, writing captions throughout.

NEVER let an experience die! Constantly refer to previous experiences so that children will learn to compare the new to the old and rely on their prior knowledge.

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